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Real DEAL delivered for top end indigenous forestry - but opportunity exists for industry to contribute even more

The Australian Forest Products Association (AFPA) has welcomed the announcement of a new research project looking at ways of boosting commercial forestry for indigenous communities in East Arnhem Land.

This project is being delivered by the University of the Sunshine Coast (USC) with lead partner Developing East Arnhem Limited (DEAL), which is an independent not-for-profit company driving economic development in East Arnhem, and will be managed by Forest and Wood Products Australia (FWPA).

The project is being funded by industry and the Federal Government as part of FWPA's voluntary matched funding program, which offers up to 1:1 matched funding against the cash commitments of external investors in support of project proposals.

The Chief Executive of AFPA Ross Hampton said, "Collaborative projects like this, directly involving the communities which will be the benefactors, is the way to get real sustainable results, and our renewable forest industries are proud to be part of it."

"These regions in the top end of Australia have real potential for renewable forest products industries. Close to developing markets in Northern Australia and South east Asia, they can both meet a growing demand, and help indigenous communities set and meet the goals they want to achieve for economic development and financial independence."

DEAL and USC will work with the Gumatj Corporation, the National Indigenous Australians Agency, Aboriginal land management organisations, a range of Northern Territory government bodies and other Aboriginal workforce development organisations in the region.

"This project is about indigenous Australians managing their native forests and it shows there are real opportunities for industry to back growth research projects, as they know the Federal and State governments are also supporting it financially by matched funds," Mr Hampton said.

"However, there is only so much direct support our renewable forest industries can give to projects like these due to the current arbitrary cap on matched funding contributions for eligible research and development, and I call on the Federal government to look at increasing, or removing the cap, to let more matched investment flow," Mr Hampton concluded.

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